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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
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Last Epiphany – Year A
Exodus 24.12-18
Psalm 99
2 Peter 1.16-21
Matthew 17.1-9

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One thing you may not know about me is that I love to climb mountains. I'm not an expert mountain climber, however. I don't have all the gear to tackle really high mountains. I don't have the ropes, or the talons, or the pick ax to scale sheer rock cliffs or dangle over alpine crevasses. But I do have the back pack, and the sturdy boots, and the sense of adventure to put in the effort and hike good-sized hills. Perhaps I'm more of a hill hiker than a mountain climber.

Nevertheless, I love to get outdoors and do some hiking. One of my family's favorite hikes is on Mount Desert Island in Maine, where we are excited to spend an extended time this summer. It's not a rigorous hike, but we pack a picnic lunch and carry it in our back packs, we put on our sturdy boots, we garner our sense of adventure, and we set out. It's not a terribly steep climb, but we take it in stride, putting one foot in front of the other, we rest along the way, and after a bit of effort, we make it to the top of the mountain. There all of God's creation unfolds before us. We can see down into the valley from where we have just come. We can see the waters of Somes Sound that cuts the island in two. And we can see out into the ocean, taking in Sutton Island, the Cranberry Islands and beyond. The view is breathtaking!

Once we soak up as much of the view as we can, we then unpack our picnic lunch, enjoy our meal, explore the mountaintop, and try to hold on to this mountaintop experience for as long as we can. We know we have to go back down to the valley from where we have come, but we take one last, longing look at the vista, we breathe in deeply another lungful of

the fresh mountain air, and we try to hold on to this mountaintop experience for as long as we can, for we know that it will sustain us until we can make the hike again.

Perhaps you have had your own mountaintop experience. Peter, James, and John had their mountaintop experience. The Gospel reading for today, the Feast of the Transfiguration, tells of how Peter, James, and John climbed a mountain with Jesus, had a mountaintop experience with the one, true, and living God, and then were challenged to hold on to that mountaintop experience as they made their way back down the mountain.

Jesus invited the disciples Peter, James, and John, to go up a mountain with him. While they were on top of the mountain, a bright cloud overshadowed them. We're told that Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. This transfiguration may be an unfamiliar concept for us, a mysterious concept, but basically Jesus' appearance was transformed to reveal his future glory – he was seen with Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet, to demonstrate that he was the embodiment of all the Law and the Prophets, that he was the Savior of the world – and that his future glory would be life after death and his return to God who had sent him. And if we have any doubt, God's voice from the cloud broke through and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved...listen to him!" – basically the same words heard at Jesus' baptism that prepared him for his ministry. And on the way down from the mountaintop, Jesus ordered his disciples to tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man had been raised from the dead.

I believe Holy Faith is on its way to having its own mountaintop experience, its own transfiguration, its own transformation to reveal its future glory. Holy Faith has had its ups and downs along the way. Some years ago, it may have seemed like the parish was in a deep valley. And at first it may have felt like an uphill struggle to put things right again, to re-establish trust in parish leadership, to exercise fully the ministry that God has given us, to

learn to do things in a new way, and to appreciate and enjoy our colleagues along the journey. But we packed our back packs with the supplies needed like the Sacraments to sustain us, we put on our boots made sturdy by the Scriptures to ground us, and we shared a sense of adventure in the Lord for the climb ahead. Our climb here at Holy Faith, like my family's climb in Maine, is not a terribly steep climb. We take it in stride, putting one foot in front of the other, resting a bit along the way, and approaching the top of the mountain.

As we near the top of the mountain, we may experience the cloud that overshadowed Jesus' disciples. That feeling may be uncertainty and uneasiness. How are we being called to be God's people here at Holy Faith? Where is God calling us to grow in our spiritual and community life as a parish? What will the future look like? But that cloud is actually God's love and care and glory surrounding us and helping us find our way.

You and I will reach that mountaintop together, and we will find ourselves looking around again at the glory of the Lord. After all, we as Christians are called not just to put in our time at church, not just to do what is expected of us, but to be transformed – transformed in our lives so that we can transform the world. Our God isn't a static God, but a transforming God – and that's what God showed Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration as Jesus was transformed to reveal his future glory, and what God is showing us at Holy Faith.

At Holy Faith there is a sense of excitement, an optimism about the future. As I shared at the annual Meeting, our parish is growing, our Average Sunday Attendance last year increased by 12%, we reached our stewardship goal of \$1 million in pledges, and we basically broke even on a \$1.5 million budget. You and I have made it this far, and we can see God's hand in all this, and give thanks to God for bringing us this far together. Holy Faith is being transformed – transformed for future glory. We can look back into the valley and see how far we have come. We can look around and see God's love, and care, and glory all around us. And the challenge for us now is how to persevere toward that mountaintop and

be transformed. We know we can't stay up there forever. We know that we will eventually have to go back down the mountain to the valley to face what lies before us – like Jesus setting his face resolutely toward Jerusalem and the cross so that the real glory of the Lord could be seen in Jesus' triumph over sin and death at the Resurrection.

And so like Peter, we may want to build some sort of dwelling or container to capture and preserve our mountaintop experience. We will take a lasting look at the glory of the Lord. We will breathe in deeply a lungful of the refreshing mountaintop air. And we will hold on to our mountaintop experience for as long as we can, to sustain us until we reach the mountaintop again.

We, God's people here at Holy Faith, have a great foundation on which to sustain us on our journey to the mountaintop experience by our commitment to the three values of worship, discipleship, and outreach.

In worship, after all, we experience the glory of the Lord. As we come together week by week we are nourished and sustained until we can come together again. As we share in the Eucharistic feast of bread and wine, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we look back at where we have been, we give thanks to God for where we are in God's presence now, and we are fed for the journey ahead.

We are becoming disciples by the various offerings for Christian formation and education for all ages in our journeys in the faith, and we are becoming disciples through the various opportunities for fellowship in the parish. We are also becoming disciples by the pastoral care given not only by the clergy, but also by one another.

And God calls us who are disciples to, in turn, go back out and reach out to the world, and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all whom we meet. We do this first with our family and friends and neighbors. And from all that God has graciously bestowed on us, we are called to share with those who are in want as an example of our outreach. We will be

sustained for the journey ahead by this our commitment to worship, discipleship, and outreach.

I told you at the beginning that I love to climb mountains, but I'm not an expert mountain climber. I don't have the ropes, or the talons, or the pick ax to scale sheer rock cliffs or dangle over alpine crevasses. If we need them, we'll get them and use them. But I don't think they will be necessary. For we have our backpacks filled with the Sacraments to sustain us, and boots made sturdy by the Scriptures to ground us, and a sense of adventure in the Lord to put in the effort and hike good-sized hills, like Holy Faith. So come, put on your own backpack, your own sturdy boots, your own sense of adventure in the Lord, and let us continue our hike together on our journey in faith. Amen.